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June 29, 1970

AMERICAN EMBASSY  
BRASILIA, BRAZIL

SUBJECT: Views of Cardinal Archbishop Dom Eugênio Salles,  
Primate of Brazil

PARTICIPANTS: Cardinal Salles  
Alexander F. Watson, Principal Officer  
Salvador  
William G. Walker, Political Officer  
Rio de Janeiro (Second interview only)

PLACE AND TIME: The Cardinal's Office June 18 and June 25, 1970

SUMMARY: 1) Cardinal Salles said that the Pastoral Document of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops was a clear statement of the Church's present policy vis a vis the government which is to continue to criticize the government on moral issues of particular concern to the Church, but to endeavor to avoid provoking the government unnecessarily. 2) The Cardinal has energetically cultivated the friendship of President Medici and believes that he has developed a good personal relationship with him. 3) The more radical, generally youthful, wing of the Church was dismissed by Dom Eugênio as being of only marginal significance at present. 4) Torture has diminished markedly since February but the torture issue is still seriously damaging Brazil's image overseas. This problem can be resolved only by opening prisons to inspection which, the Cardinal feels, can be done only by a domestic entity. 5) Dom Eugênio is rigidly and passionately opposed to any birth control techniques which inhibit a bodily function. 6) The meetings in Salvador between representatives of the Church and rural labor are merely an initial attempt to determine how the Church can assist the rural worker. 7) The Cardinal seems more confident than before that the moderate approach which he has urged the Church to take toward the government is best for the Church and he seems less worried now about possible dissension within the Church.

Introduction. The reporting officer called on Cardinal Salles to discuss inter alia the Eleventh General Assembly of the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil which was held in Brasília from May 17-27. A week later Mr. Walker,

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who was visiting Northeast Brazil for the first time, was introduced to the Cardinal and another discussion ensued. Those of the Cardinal's views which are of most political significance are reported below. No effort has been made to indicate which views were expressed in which interview.

1. The CNBB's Pastoral Document and Church-State Relations. Cardinal Salles said he believed that the Pastoral Document of the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil had been well received by most elements of the Brazilian government, the Church and the general public. He stressed that the tone of the document was evangelical rather than political and added that he and most church leaders were not endeavoring to have the church play a more apolitical role. Dom Eugênio explained that by this he means that the church will not criticize the government on strictly political matters and will not involve itself in disputes within the government, but, on the other hand, will continue to speak out on moral issues, such as torture and human rights, which are of direct and crucial interest to the Church. He said that the Pastoral Document was a clear expression of the Church's position and added that he had also explained it frankly in personal conversations with President Medici and other government officials. The Cardinal asserted that the Church was not accommodating itself to the government but was trying to avoid being unnecessarily provocative in the hope of preserving enough influence with the government to be able to persuade it to deal satisfactorily with the specific issues of most concern to the Church.

2. The Cardinal's Personal Relationships with the President and other Officials. In recent weeks Cardinal Salles has spent more than seven hours in private discussions with the highest officials of the Brazilian government. Besides several brief, essentially ceremonial conversations with President Medici in Salvador and Brasília, the Cardinal had an hour long private session with him. He also had a three hour conversation with Justice Minister Buzaid behind locked doors in Rio de Janeiro and briefer conversations with Minister of Education Passarinho and other civilian and military figures. In response to a question, Dom Eugênio said that he had met presidential advisers Manoel Neto and Otávio Costa and had been favorably impressed by them, but stressed that, although he had heard that they were Medici's emissaries to the Church, he dealt principally with Buzaid and the President himself.

In his conversations with officials the Cardinal discussed the broad range of Church-State relations, but em-

phasized the Church's concern with the suspension of habeas corpus in political cases, the institution of censorship and his belief that the government must take action to deal with the torture issue.

Cardinal Salles placed special importance on his efforts to cultivate the friendship of President Medici. He said that the President used to be very suspicious of him and believed him to be involved in the dissemination through the Church and the Papal Justice and Peace Committee of information concerning torture and maltreatment of Indians which was disparaging to Brazil. The Cardinal believes that by conversing and praying with the President in recent weeks he has expelled the President's doubts about him, for the time being at least, and has established a good personal relationship founded in mutual respect. He pointed out that as a courtesy to the President a copy of the final draft of the CNBB document was delivered to him before it was made available to the press. Dom Eugênio said that he genuinely liked President Medici very much and found him to be a simple, sincere, deeply religious man. Cardinal Salles is aware, however, that his relationship with the President is fragile and he expressed fear that it might be damaged by elements, especially within the armed forces, which are suspicious of him and influential with the President. He did not mention any names in this regard.

The Cardinal was favorably impressed with Minister Buzaid, whom he described as an intelligent and thoughtful man in the extremely difficult position of having to be the principal political spokesman for a government consisting of several factions with differing political views. Dom Eugênio alluded to difficulties caused for the Justice Minister by "all those military officers" operating behind his back. He said that despite his confidence in the good will of the President and Buzaid, he did not yet have real faith or confidence in the ability of the government as a whole to labor for real social justice.

3. Attitude toward more Radical Wing of Church. When the reporting officer asked Dom Eugênio whether he thought the CNBB document and what might appear to some to be a more accommodating position on the part of the Church vis a vis the government would alienate the more radical wing of the Church, he replied that he had already received some strong negative reactions from that sector. But, somewhat surprisingly, he tended to dismiss the reaction as unimportant. He said that the young priests who were opposed to the Church's posture were a small



group of marginal importance. He seemed unsympathetic to young radicals and almost intolerant of them. He disagreed flatly with the reporting officer's suggestion that that group might represent the Church of the future. When asked if he expected more young priests to leave the Church in the near future, the Cardinal replied that he thought that most priests who were going to leave the Church had already done so and that it was better that they leave rather than remain and be disgruntled. The Cardinal added that the Church leadership should represent the broad community of the Church and not one group such as young or old priests.

The reporting officer mentioned Dom Helder Câmara as a radical churchman who perhaps should not be dismissed so lightly, but Dom Eugênio replied that Dom Helder was removed from the mainstream of Church life and did not have as much influence as in the past. He emphasized that he and Dom Helder, whom he called "a prophet", were like brothers and said that both sought the same goals for the Church but by different paths. Much of the Cardinal's time with government leaders recently was spent defending Dom Helder from enthusiastic critics. He stressed to them that Dom Helder preached the attainment of social justice by nonviolent means and therefore should be looked on with favor by the government. The resistance to this approach from individuals who wanted "to do something about Dom Helder" was very strong, however, and Cardinal Salles did not think his arguments changed many governmental minds. He added wryly that Dom Helder's inflammatory address in Paris had not made his task any easier.

4. Political Prisoners, Torture and Brazil's Image Overseas. The Cardinal said that as far as he could tell there were between 400 and 500 political prisoners in Brazil. A more precise figure was difficult to obtain, he explained, because of differing definitions of what constituted a political prisoner, but he dismissed as gross exaggerations reports of thousands imprisoned for political reasons.

When asked about the alleged torture of political prisoners by Brazilian security forces, Dom Eugênio said that his sources indicated that, although torture still was taking place, there had been a drastic reduction in its level since last February. He did not know what had brought about this change. His conversations with President Médici have convinced the Cardinal that the President is clearly opposed to torture, but he could not confirm whether the President had issued an order specifically forbidding it.



During his recent trips to the Vatican Dom Eugênio noted that the torture issue was the primary cause of Brasil's truly terrible image in Europe, the alleged mistreatment of Indians having faded into the background. He believes the descriptions of torture in Brasil which are circulating in Europe are exaggerated and observed that almost any information offered to substantiate claims that prisoners were tortured in Brasil was readily accepted there whereas questioning of the accuracy of such information was belittled. The Cardinal repeated the belief he expressed in February (see SLV-1) that there existed a well organized effort on the part of some Brazilians overseas and others to calumniate Brasil deliberately. Although the Cardinal would not say of whom he supposed this organization to consist, he argued that some of the documents concerning alleged torture which the Church had received had been prepared in so sophisticated and costly a manner that they could only have been the work of well financed and well organized groups.

In the Cardinal's view the only manner in which the Brazilian government can effectively counteract this propaganda is to open its prisons for inspections. He said that he had stated this view energetically to the President and other governmental officials. The reporting officer asked Dom Eugênio who he thought should do the inspecting. He explained that some time ago he had come to the conclusion that inspection by foreigners or an international agency such as the Red Cross was out of the question, implying that strong nationalists within the government and the armed forces would not tolerate foreign meddling. Next, he said, he had seriously considered the possibility of the Church's making the inspection, but now had ruled that out. So, he said, his latest view was that the inspection should be performed by a Brazilian governmental entity, such as the Ministry of Justice or a court.

5. Birth Control. The reporting officer observed that recently there had been somewhat more discussion of birth control in Brasil and asked if the Church's position on the matter had changed. Cardinal Salles stated emphatically that it had not. He said that the Church's position was that a man should not have more children than he can educate and support, but that birth control methods which were "against nature", that is, which inhibit or interfere with a bodily function, were prohibited. When asked what sort of birth control methods could be considered to be not "against nature", the Cardinal replied that he did not know but that the Church viewed with favor medical research

which might develop such methods. At this point the reporting officer mentioned that Salvador had one of the world's foremost scientists engaged in reproductive research, Dr. Elsinar Coutinho, who had just returned from a Nobel symposium on this matter. Dom Eugênio snapped, "His work is against the Church". He continued angrily that he had been informed by students that Dr. Coutinho was working on methods of sterilization and that the only reason he had not publicly denounced the doctor's activities was because he did not wish to act solely on the basis of reports from students. He added that the fact that Dr. Coutinho's research was financed largely by foreign organizations was not appreciated by Brazilians. The Cardinal emphasized that birth control was an extremely sensitive issue in Brazil and warned the reporting officer and the United States not to meddle with it.

Dom Eugênio cooled off a little and said that letters, pamphlets, petitions and so forth in favor of birth control constituted the largest single portion of his mail. He said that such information comes from all over the world and suggested that it was the fruit of a well coordinated campaign designed to influence him and, he assumed, many others. He added that he does not even bother to read such mail any more because it just makes him angry.

6. Rural Labor and the Church. Cardinal Salles said he planned to attend the opening on June 29 of the second week of meetings between representatives of the Church and the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers to be held at the Salvador Archdiocese's Leadership Training Center.

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The first week of the conference would be devoted to examination of Means of Social Communication; the second, to Unionism and Human Realization. Attending the meetings were to be some 60 rural labor leaders, technicians and representatives of the Church. The Cardinal stressed that these meetings would be essentially exploratory to see what assistance the Church could furnish to rural workers. He expected to encounter no difficulties from the government but noted that in part to avoid such difficulties the conference was being held in Salvador rather than in Recife where the Church is viewed with greater suspicion by the government.

7. Comment. Whereas in previous conversations Cardinal Salles had been somewhat defensive and worried lest his accommodating but balanced approach to Church-State relations appear to be a sell-out and <sup>be</sup> subject to fierce at-

tack from the more liberal and radical wings of the Church, in these interviews he seemed confident that his approach was best for the Church. The Cardinal obviously believes that his moderate approach has already born impressive fruit, such as his good personal relationship with a formerly suspicious President, the government's conciliatory attitude toward the CNBB general assembly, the absence of governmental objections to the meetings between representatives of the Church and rural labor and perhaps even the reduction in the level of torture. In addition, the Church while securing solid improvements in its relations with the government has been able to continue protesting vigorously and publicly those governmental policies of which it does not approve. Another factor which must please Dom Eugênio is the support which his efforts seem to have from the Vatican with which he is in frequent contact. As an example of the Pope's support for the Cardinal's efforts to improve relations between the Church and the Brazilian government, Bahia Governor Designate Antônio Carlos Magalhães told the reporting officer that when Dom Eugênio returned from his last visit to Rome he brought to President Medici a letter from the Pope in which the latter expressed his appreciation for the Brazilian government's recent attitude toward the Church.

Perhaps contributing to the Cardinal's self confidence or perhaps deriving from it is a lack of concern with, almost a disdain for, the more radical elements within the Brazilian Church. Dom Eugênio does not seem to perceive any significant challenge from the left to his authority and that of the currently predominate moderate-liberal faction. He is more worried about what he considers to be conservative but anti-Church elements within the armed forces. Soundings made by the reporting officer indicate that Dom Eugênio's lack of concern with the left wing of the Church may well be founded in reality, at least within a Bahian context. Young priests at the Instituto Teológico da Bahia have accepted the CNBB document rather passively and, although believing the Cardinal to be too accommodating toward the government, nevertheless recognize that he is making some genuine efforts to bring about greater social justice. Dom Timóteo, the respected liberal Abbot of the São Bento Monastery, said that liberal and radical clergymen initially were disturbed by what they perceived to be the overly conciliatory attitude of the CNBB document, but upon further reflection found it acceptable to them. However, although Cardinal Salles seems to have solid footing in Bahia, it may be that he has misjudged the level of resentment and radical fervor among priests in other parts of Brazil.



It is interesting that the Cardinal seems to have laid to rest the idea advanced so enthusiastically last February by Professor Cândido Mendes and others to the effect that the International Red Cross or a similar organization should inspect Brazil's prisons in an effort to halt torture of political prisoners and consequently to undercut the tales of torture which are so well disseminated throughout the world. This decision by the Cardinal as well as his conclusion that the Church should not perform the inspection probably stem from an unwillingness on his part to jeopardize the fragile rapport which the Church has established with the government. Should the Church publicly nose around prisons or advocate international intervention in Brazilian internal affairs, it certainly would antagonize powerful elements within the government and encourage those who already are suspicious of the Church. Nevertheless, Cardinal Salles seems determined to convince the government that it must allow some reasonably credible organization to examine its prisons if it seriously wishes to remove the tarnish of torture from its reputation.

The Cardinal's peevishness on the issue of birth control may stem from a tension between his own private views and those which he as the representative of the Pope in Brazil must express. Nevertheless, the inflexibility and passion with which the highest ranking Roman Catholic clergyman in Brazil expresses his views on birth control must be born in mind by any private, public or international agency concerned about population control in Brazil.

During these interviews as in the past Cardinal Salles was frank and well organized. His thoughts were presented in a rapid, unhesitating manner and he seemed genuinely interested in keeping the Consulate informed about his own views as well as attitudes and developments within the Church.

  
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